“Être” is the verb of the subject, “avoir” of the direct object

Now let’s go a bit deeper into grammar. I like to tell my students that “être” is the verb of the subject, and “avoir” the verb of the direct object. “Être” is “allergic” to direct object: see what happens now…

To say to take something down, in, out, up… we also use these verbs:

* Descendre la poubelle: to take the garbage downstairs
* Monter la valise: to take the suitcase upstairs
* Sortir les chiens: to take the dogs out
* Rentrer la voiture: to put the car inside the garage

Also

* Passer + time = to spend + time

So now, **you are going to have a direct object:** la poubelle, la valise… Can you guess which verb you’ll use to make passé composé? “Avoir”, that’s right!

When “être” verbs use “avoir”

* J’ai descendu le sac: I took the bag downstairs
* J’ai monté l’escalier: I went up the stairs
* J’ai sorti la voiture: I took the car outside
* J’ai rentré les jouets: I took the toys inside
* J’ai passé le weekend à Paris: I spent the weekend in Paris

Reflexive verbs + direct object

Some reflexive verbs can be used by a direct object, in particular part of the body. In this case, you will still use “être”, but there will be no agreement: not with the subject, not with the direct object…

* Camille s’est lavé les mains – Camille washed her hands.

Note also that we say “she washed (herself) THE hands”, not as in English “she washed HER hands”, we use a definite article, not a possessive adjective.